

Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson, April 11, 1831, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

SECRETARY VAN BUREN TO JACKSON.1

1 Van Buren wrote to B. F. Butler and to Thomas Ritchie giving his reasons for resigning. See Library of Congress, Van Buren MSS.

Washington, April 11, 1831.

Dear Sir, I feel it to be my duty to retire from the Office to which your confidence and partiality called me. The delicacy of this step, under the circumstances in which it is taken, will, I trust, be deemed an ample apology for stating more at large than might otherwise have been necessary, the reasons by which I am influenced.

From the moment of taking my seat in your Cabinet, it has been my anxious wish and zealous endeavour, to prevent a premature agitation of the question of your Successor; and at all events to discountenance, and if possible, repress the disposition at an early day manifested, to connect my name with that disturbing topic. Of the sincerity and the constancy of this disposition, no one has had a better opportunity to judge than yourself. It has however been unavailing. Circumstances not of my creation, and altogether beyond my controul, have given to this subject a turn which cannot now be remedied, except by a self-disfranchisement, which if even dictated by my individual wishes, could hardly be reconcileable with propriety or self-respect.

Concerning the injurious effects which the circumstance of a member of the Cabinet's occupying the relation towards the Country to which I have adverted, is calculated to have upon the conduct of public affairs, there cannot, I think, at this time, be room for

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two opinions. Diversities of ulterior preference among the friends of an Administration are unavoidable; and even if the respective advocates of those, thus placed in rivalry, be patriotic enough to resist the tem[p]tation of creating obstacles to the advancement of him to whose elevation they are opposed, by embarrassing the branch of public service com[m]itted to his charge; they are nevertheless from their position, exposed to the suspicion of entertaining and encouraging such views: a suspicion which can seldom fail in the end, to aggravate into present alienation and hos[t]ility, the prospective differences which first gave rise to it. Thus, under the least unfavorable consequences, individual injustice is suffered, and the Administration embarrassed and weakened. Whatever may have been the course of things, under the peculiar circumstances of the earlier stage of the Republic, my experience has fully satisfied me, that, at this day, when the field of selection has become so extended, the circumstance referred to, by augmenting the motives and sources of opposition to the measures of the Executive, must unavoidably prove the cause of injury to the public service, for a counterpoise to which we may in vain look to the peculiar qualifications of any Individual; and even if I should in this be mistaken, still I cannot so far deceive myself, as to believe for a moment, that I am included in the exceptions. These obstructions to the successful prosecution of public affairs, when superadded to that opposition which is inseparable from our free institutions, and which every administration must expect, present a mass, to which the operations of the Government should at no time be voluntarily exposed; and the more especially should it be avoided, at so eventful a period in the affairs of the World, when our Country may need the utmost harmony in her Councils.

Such being my impressions, the path of duty is plain: and I not only submit with cheerfulness to whatever personal sacrifices may be involved in the surrender of the station I occupy; but I make it my ambition to set an example which, should it in the progress of the Government, be deemed, notwithstanding the humility of its origin, worthy of respect and observance, cannot, I think, fail to prove essentially and permanently beneficial.

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Allow me, Sir, to present one more view of the subject. You have consented to stand before your Constituents for re-election. Of their decision, resting as it does upon the unbought suffrages of a free, numerous and widely extended people, it becomes no man to speak with certainty. Judging, however, from the past, and making a reasonable allowance for the fair exercise of the intelligence and public spirit of your Fellow Citizens, I cannot hesitate in adopting the belief that the confidence, as well in your capacity for civil duties as in your civic virtues, already so spontaneously and strikingly displayed, will be manifested with increased energy, now, that all candid observers must admit their utmost expectations to have been more than realized.

If this promise, so auspicious to the interests of our common Country be fulfilled, the concluding term of your Administration will, in the absence of any prominent cause of discord among its supporters, afford a most favorable opportunity for the full accomplishment of those important public objects, in the prosecution of which I have witnessed on your part such steady vigilance and untiring devotion. To the unfavorable influence which my continuance in your Cabinet, under existing circumstances, may exercise upon this flattering prospect, I cannot Sir, without a total disregard of the lights of experience, and without shutting my eyes to the obvious tendency of things for the future, be insensible. Having, moreover, from a deep conviction of its importance to the Country, been among the most urgent of your advisers to yield yourself to the obvious wishes of the people, and knowing the sacrifice of personal feeling which was involved in your acquiescence, I cannot reconcile it to myself to be in any degree the cause of embarrassment to you during a period which, as it certainly will be of deep interest to your Country, is moreover destined to bring to its close your patriotic, toilsome and eventful public life.

From these considerations, I feel it to be doubly my duty to resign a post, the retention of which is so calculated to attract assaults upon your Administration, to which there might otherwise be no inducement: Assaults of which, whatever be their aim, the most

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important as well as most injurious effect, is upon those public interests, which deserve and should command the support of all good Citizens. This duty, I should have discharged at an earlier period, but for considerations, partly of a public partly of a personal nature, connected with the circumstances, which were calculated to expose its performance then to mis-construction and misrepresentation.

Having thus explained the motives which govern me in thus severing, and with seeming abruptness, the official ties by which we have been associated, there remains but one duty for me to perform. It is to make my profound and sincere acknowledgements for that steady support and cheering confidence which, in the discharge of my public duties, I have, under all circumstances, received at your hands; as well as for the personal kindness at all times extended to me.

Rest assured, Sir, that the success of your Administration, and the happiness of your private life, will ever constitute objects of the deepest solicitude with

Your sincere friend and Obedient Servant.

P. S. I will continue in Office of course until my successor is appointed.